Humanising online teaching through care-centred pedagogies

Hale Kızılcık
Modern Languages Department, Middle East Technical University

Aylin S. Dewan Türüdü
English Language School, TED University

One of the main challenges regarding online teaching involves creating spaces in which learners establish and maintain connections with the teacher, other learners and the content. By exploring the concept of care in online learning, we aim to address this challenge. Framed by Noddings' (2013) ethics of care, this qualitative case study explored effective course design elements and instructional behaviours in an online course to identify practices that suggest the presence of care. Data collected through student feedback and peer observations provide insights into effective pedagogical practices, and our analysis reveals that these practices overlap with some of the four components of Noddings' care-centred model of education: modelling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Our study suggests that what makes an online course effective might be the invisible care elements underlying its design and implementation.

Implications for practice and policy:

- Online education experience can be enhanced by applying care-centred pedagogies into online settings to guide course design and instruction.
- Educators can incorporate care principles into courses without putting excessive emphasis on emotions, which may be more preferable at higher education levels.

Keywords: online learning, care-centred education, pedagogy of care, course design and delivery

Introduction

Recent political, economic and technological developments have led to an unprecedented increase in online education in higher education. Blended and fully online models are supplementing and replacing face-to-face courses and programmes, and this shift requires educators and educational researchers to reconsider course design practices and instructional behaviours. When undertaking such an endeavour, the concept of transactional distance deserves particular attention. Moore (1997) defined transactional distance as the physical separation (in terms of time and space) between the teacher and learners that may lead to a psychological and communication gap. In this gap, "potential misunderstanding between the inputs of instructor and those of learner" may occur (p. 22). To bridge the gap, distance education should be designed in ways that support learner interaction with content, peers and the teacher.

Although advancements in technology provide ample opportunities to enhance learner-to-learner, learner-to-course, and learner-to-teacher interactions, some studies have found that online environments create a sense of decontextualisation, become teacher-centred and that relationships are adversely affected by distance (Moorhouse et al., 2021; Rabin, 2021; Tang et al., 2021). A major challenge in online education remains addressing "students' psychological needs (for belonging, socialising, cooperation) as well as securing a suitable level of interaction among students" (Markovic et al., 2021, p. 13). The sense of isolation and disconnectedness associated with online environments may hinder students' success (Markovic et al., 2021; Tang & Walker-Gleaves, 2022; Walker & Gleaves, 2016) and research highlights the impact of making connections and establishing meaningful relationships on student learning (Anderson et al., 2020; Walker & Gleaves, 2016). Thus, humanising education by implementing design and pedagogies "to enable students to feel connected to the teacher, their peers, the course content, the institution, and relevant knowledge-based communities" is important (Singh, 2017, p. 284). One way of achieving this is through pedagogy of care.

Despite being presumed a fundamental part of being a teacher, what the term care refers to is not always clear. This study takes Gordon et al.'s (1996) definition of care as its basis. In their words, care is a "set of

relational practices that foster mutual recognition and realization, growth, development, protection, empowerment, and human community, culture and possibility" (as cited in Strachan, 2020, p. 53).

The role of the human element, hence care, has become more prominent due to the intensified focus on online learning pedagogies. Nevertheless, limited research exists on care (Burke & Larmar, 2021; Rabin 2021; Robinson et al., 2020; Rose & Adams, 2014; Velasquez et al., 2013), and most studies on pedagogic care have been conducted outside higher education contexts (Anderson et al., 2020; Walker & Gleaves, 2016). As Strachan (2020) emphasised, further investigation is needed in the higher education context. Responding to this call, this study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What elements of care are present in design principles and instructional behaviour considered effective by students?
- What elements of care are present in design principles and instructional behaviour considered effective by teachers?

Pedagogy of care

Noddings is one of the leading philosophers and scholars who extensively theorised care, its centrality in morality, with implications for education. She is known for her important contributions to the development of care theory, especially in connecting it to education (Trout, 2012). Discussing care ethics and moral education in detail is beyond the scope of this paper, and our focus is on how Noddings described care in the context of education. Noddings (2005) is highly critical of an educational approach that puts too much emphasis on academic achievement, accountability and measurable goals. She argued that the main goal of education and schools at all levels should be to provide individuals with opportunities to learn to care for themselves, others, other non-human animals, environment, objects and ideas. Curriculum and teaching should be designed in ways to foster caring, and teachers, as the primary carer in teacher-student relations, have an ethical responsibility and a central role in nurturing care.

An ethic of care argues that caring is relational (Noddings, 2012). The carer, who is usually but not always the teacher, listens and responds with honest concerns to the expressed interests or needs of the other(s). The cared-for receives this caring and responds in a way that shows it. Noddings (2005) claimed that reciprocity is essential for caring. Even when teachers do care, they may not be able to make connections "that would complete caring relations", in which case a caring relation is not achieved (p. 2). On the other hand, responding to the interests and needs of the other does not mean that the carer has to accept them. There may be instances when it is not possible for the carer to meet conveyed needs and interests. In such cases, the caring action lies in listening to the voice of the other. As Noddings (2005) stated, "all children need to feel safe in their relations with teachers. It must be acceptable to admit error, confusion, or even distaste for the subject at hand" (p. 108).

To establish caring relations, as the cared-for, students have responsibilities as well. Noddings (2005) stated that "students must accept responsibility for communicating their needs to teachers. They must understand that their responses enliven or dampen their teacher's enthusiasm" (p. 108). When their caring is not reciprocated, teachers suffer "dreadful loss of energy" (p. 17). In Noddings' (2005) words, "one of the greatest tasks of teachers is to help students how to be recipients of care" (p. 108). She argued that students can learn to receive care from their teachers:

> The contributions of teachers and students [to the establishment of caring relations] are necessarily unequal, but they are nonetheless mutual; the relationship is marked by reciprocity. Students cannot be expected to teach their teachers, but they can be expected to respond with greater sensitivity to attempts to promote their own growth. (p. 108)

A major obstacle that threatens the establishment and maintenance of caring relations occurs when students' needs, and interests are not aligned with the subject matter that the teacher is teaching (Noddings, 2006). In such situations, the caring action would be avoiding a stance which insists that students need to master the subject matter for their own good or that they should develop an intrinsic motivation for the subject matter. Instead, "teachers can help by assuring students that they should not feel obliged to develop an intrinsic interest in everything that is taught" (2006, p. 22). On the other hand, it should be communicated

that students need to be performing at an adequate level and the teacher is willing to help the student achieve this goal.

Noddings (1988, 2005, 2012, 2013) underlined the uniqueness of each individual and context, and states that there are no recipes for care and provides a general framework to guide educational implementations. She outlined a care-centred model of education which involves four components: modelling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. The first component, modelling, refers to the necessity of showing (modelling) "in our own behaviour what it means to care" (Noddings, 2012, p. 237). For example, as the primary carer, the teacher models caring by demonstrating "desirable ways of interacting with people" (Noddings, 1988, p. 223). The teacher "treat[s] students with respect and consideration and encourage[s] them to treat each other in a similar fashion" (Noddings, 1988, p. 223).

The second component, dialogue, manifests itself as the teacher and students engage in open non-judgmental discussion and reflection in a trusting environment. Dialogue connects the carer and the cared-for to each other. It also "helps to maintain caring relations and helps us and our students reflect upon and critique our own practice (Noddings, 2005, p. 23). The third component, practice, entails providing students with opportunities to care for and help others including their peers. To practise care, students temporarily take on the role of carers to understand, share and support others. For instance, small group work, where students work with peers help them practise caring (Noddings, 1988). Confirmation, the fourth component, refers to helping others to recognise "a better self", a version of themselves that they aspire to be, and "[encouraging] its development" (Noddings, 2012, p. 239). Dialogue and practice are key to the establishment of confirmation. Through dialogue and practice, the carer learns what the cared-for wants. Discussing expectations and providing effective feedback play a central role in establishing confirmation.

Noddings' ethic of care theory is primarily centred on primary and secondary schools, and it is not an online education theory. However, it has been extended by some researchers (Burke & Larmar, 2021; Robinson et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2021; Velasquez et al., 2013) to online education. Indeed, Noddings (2013) stated that the carer is present in her acts of caring and it is possible to convey presence even in physical absence by demonstrating signs of presence such as interest in the other, respect, and wish for the other's well-being. In our study, we drew on the literature and empirical data from our study to elaborate on the four components in Noddings' model.

Studies of pedagogy of care

Mainly, two approaches have been adopted in studies investigating care: caring through the eyes of students and caring through the perspective of teachers. Stating that care in the context of online education differs from care in face-to-face environments (Burke & Larmar, 2021; Robinson et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2021), a number of studies have specifically focused on exploring how care is demonstrated online (Burke & Larmar, 2021; Lambrev & Cruz, 2021; Moorhouse & Tiet, 2021; Rabin, 2021; Robinson et al., 2020; Velasquez et al., 2013).

Caring teachers try to do their best to increase students' success. Such teachers "listen to students, show empathy, support students, actively support students' learning, give students appropriate and meaningful praise, have high expectations of work and behaviour and show an active concern in students' personal lives" (Walker & Gleaves, 2016, p. 66). Moorhouse and Tiet (2021) stated that online environments require new strategies since the physical distance and the online environment prevent regular classroom interactions such as casual chats and private conversations. To create a more humanised environment and to minimise the teacher-centredness of online education, teachers' sharing more of their own life, establishing informal communication channels such as messaging applications, getting student feedback through polls and asking students to keep their cameras on were suggested as ways to form good relations with students. Similarly, Lambrev and Cruz (2021) reported that teachers' sharing parts of their lives and allocating the time for genuine conversations humanised instruction. These enabled instructors to emotionally connect with their students, which created a sense of community.

In Tang et al.'s (2021) study, building relationships, having a welcoming attitude, patiently listening to students and responding to their needs, replying to emails promptly, and teacher's willingness to help were considered caring behaviour. Another important aspect students associated with care was the teacher's efforts in planning course delivery: creating a fun classroom atmosphere (e.g., through games such as

Kahoot), providing clear, detailed explanations and checking and monitoring comprehension. The students based care on "critical and well thought out pedagogical design for promoting students' learning" (p. 12). Paying attention to student needs and listening to their problems made a difference in students' motivation and engagement in the course. Therefore, students appreciated caring teachers who initiated to collect students' opinions and comments. Care was also associated with presence. Most students preferred teachers having their cameras on as it established a feeling of teacher presence. Other teacher behaviour creating the feeling of presence was addressing students by their names, responsiveness in answering student questions, teachers' genuine willingness to help and being within reach to help. Such behaviour helped students feel secure.

In their study of care in online settings Velasquez et al. (2013) found that students considered making reminders, providing constructive feedback, and responding to student requests as caring. Additionally, the study showed that the teacher's attentiveness to instructional design was an indirect way of demonstrating care. For example, providing a variety of resources relevant to student needs and simplifying resources according to the level of students were mentioned as caring behaviour. Teacher's use of technology to support student learning was regarded by all participants as another way to care. Lastly, students felt cared for when their teachers made an effort to "to confirm students' self-confidence and wellbeing at all times and especially when the student ha[d] done something wrong" (p. 109).

Three studies of online care have utilised Noddings' four components (modelling, dialogue, practice, confirmation) as a framework to examine how each component contributed to the establishment of a care-centred online learning space. In relation to modelling, instructor's active online presence, being available, flexibility (Burke & Larmar, 2021; Robinson et al., 2020), careful consideration of workload while planning and executing the course, synchronous interaction opportunities (Robinson et al., 2020), and teachers' sharing personal information (Rabin, 2021) led to students' feeling cared for. In Burke and Larmar's (2021) study responding to students in a timely and supportive manner was categorised as modelling since such behaviour shows online presence and helps students feel as "valuable members of the learning community" (p. 607). Robinson et al. (2020) found that certain forms of dialogue including personal communication opportunities, prompt response to emails and eliciting feedback on various course elements nurtured a feeling of care. In Burke and Larmar's (2021) study, use of group work for dialogue was indicated as a way of caring. However, they emphasised the need for instructors' deliberate planning to integrate opportunities for dialogue.

Robinson et al. (2020) included providing opportunities for peer support under practice. On the other hand, in their pedagogical interpretation of practice, Burke and Larmar (2021) extend the concept of practice to students' developing care for course content and thus include examples of active learning under practice. Activities such as discussion boards, group work and use of shared online documents were given as examples. Researchers differed in the way they classified caring actions under the four components. For example, Burke and Larmar (2021) categorised creating opportunities for dialogue as dialogue, however, Rabin (2021) included this under practice. As Rabin (2021) noted, the use of breakout rooms in class discussions did not necessarily lead to dialogue and connection among students. In all three studies (Burke & Larmar, 2021; Rabin, 2021; Robinson et al., 2020) personalised, qualitative and timely feedback were associated with confirmation. Rabin (2021) included assessment as creating opportunities for confirmation.

Methods

A qualitative case study was used to explore effective design principles and instructional behaviours in an online course through the lens of care. A case study was chosen since the aim was to investigate a real-life, bounded system through use of multiple data sources (Creswell, 2013). The case in this study is bound by a 14-week online course in an English medium university in Turkey.

The context

The research was conducted at an English-medium university in Turkey which offered only face-to-face education before the pandemic. Data was collected in fall 2021, one semester after emergency remote teaching began due to the pandemic. The research was conducted in relation to a career preparation course taught by the first author (teacher-researcher).

It is important to note that the course was not designed based on care ethics. The course was a required course that lasted 14 weeks. There were three 50-minute lessons each week, which were executed synchronously. All course materials were shared on the learning management system (LMS). The course was offered to third- and fourth-year students and covered a range of skills, including writing emails, preparing job application documents, socialising and interviewing. There was strong emphasis on spoken communication, and interactive learning spaces were essential to achieve the course goals. For this reason, students were encouraged to have their cameras on during lessons.

The written communication assessment items included writing a curriculum vitae (CV), cover letter, statement of purpose, application form and a reflection task. The oral communication assessment components were participating in small talk, a business meeting, an interview and elevator speech. Student participation was graded. Other tasks and materials relevant to this study are explained in Appendix A.

Participants

The participants of the study were four teachers and 101 students taking the course. A purposive sampling was used in selecting participants. Four teachers, whom the teacher-researcher had known for over 15 years, were invited to observe her classes. They all had experience teaching in the context of the study. The rationale for choosing these four teachers was that two of the teachers (T1, T3) had taught the course before, and the other two (T2, T4) were teacher trainers. Therefore, the teacher-researcher believed that they would provide honest and high-quality feedback. Background information about the teachers can be found in Appendix B.

Although 103 students were registered, two students never attended the course. Students were from various departments (40 chemistry, 37 statistics, and 22 education, one history, and one physics major). A total of 63 students were in their senior year, and 38 were third-year students. Some students had met before, and others were meeting their peers for the first time.

Data collection

Data was collected through student reflection tasks, peer observations and end-of-term surveys. These practices were already a part of the course and not specifically administered to collect data for this research. Consequently, they did not include any references to the concept of care. The reflection task given to students was a part of the course assessment. The task was worth 5 points, and students were assessed on their ability to clearly express their opinions and provide constructive feedback. Since this was a part of the assessment, all (N = 101) students completed the reflection task. The task question was as follows:

- Evaluate the materials you have used and classroom activities/tasks you have completed so far.
    - Which one(s) did you find most helpful to support your learning?
    - What can be modified to increase the effectiveness of the course?

For peer observations, teachers were invited to observe the teacher-researcher's lessons in the third, fourth and fifth weeks of the course. Each observation lasted 50 minutes, and the teachers were asked to provide overall feedback on instructional techniques and tasks used in class. Post-observation meetings in which the observers shared their feedback were conducted online. The teacher took written notes of the feedback. An overview of the observed lessons is provided in Appendix C.

The last data collection item was the online survey the university administered to collect information about the effectiveness of courses. The survey included closed-item responses rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), and an open-ended question asking students for additional comments. As the survey was not specifically designed for the present study, only results of the questions relevant to course design and effectiveness were included. Questions such as students' course attendance percentage and whether the course was a must or elective course were not included.

Data analysis

Data from student reflection tasks, peer observations, and the open-ended question from the end-of-term surveys were analysed using thematic analysis. This analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six

phases of thematic analysis, and Fereday and Muir-Cochrane's (2006) hybrid process of inductive and deductive thematic analysis. The phases of data analysis are explained in detail; however, it should be noted that the data analysis process was iterative with researchers alternating between different stages throughout the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

As the student reflection task was the main data collection tool, data analysis is first explained in reference to this task. In the first phase, both researchers engaged in multiple readings to familiarise themselves with the data and make notes of their initial ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the second phase, guided by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane's (2006) thematic analysis, both an inductive and deductive approach was taken. Before analysing the data, a theory-driven coding template was created. The overarching themes were determined by using the four components of Noddings' framework (modelling, dialogue, practice, confirmation). However, since Noddings' theory provides only general principles on what these components encompass, the researchers reviewed the literature about course design elements and instructional behaviour considered as caring to identify codes. To give an example, "appropriate teaching methods", and "peer-to-peer support" taken from the literature were used as a-priori codes. To keep an open-mind and not restrict the analysis, a data-driven approach was also adopted. When data revealed new information, new codes were created. For example, the theme of a better self was expanded into three sub-themes: becoming a better speaker of English, becoming more aware of competencies, and becoming more confident communicators.

To test the reliability of the codes, the researchers coded 10% of the data together, which allowed them to reach a common understanding and revise the coding template if necessary. Following the initial coding of the data, the codes were sorted and clustered under relevant themes and sub-themes. The rest of the data was coded by the teacher-researcher. Following this, the second researcher read all the data and checked the coded segments against the coding scheme. In this stage, 16 coded segments out of 498 segments were discussed and agreed upon. Finally, themes were reviewed by both researchers to ensure there were no overlaps. As one last step, the names of some themes and sub-themes were changed for conciseness as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The same data analysis procedure explained for the reflection task was followed for the analysis of peer observations and the open-ended questions from the end-of-term survey. The only data type not analysed by the researchers themselves was the Likert-scale items on the end-of-term survey, which were automatically analysed by the university with the results being announced on the university's online portal.

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for establishing trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry were observed to achieve credibility, transferability and dependability. Prolonged engagement of the teacher-researcher in the context and the involvement of a second researcher in data analysis were methods used to achieve credibility. For transferability, a thick description of the context was presented. To ensure dependability, the second researcher used a coding scheme to check if coded segments matched with the identified themes. To enhance dependability, three data sources were used for data triangulation. To increase credibility representative excerpts were presented to support inferences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

As for research ethics, Institutional Review Board (270-ODTU-2021) approval was obtained from the first author's institution. All participant names were removed to maintain anonymity, and any changes made to quotes were indicated in square brackets. One limitation regarding the research was the power relations between the teacher-researcher and participants. Since the teacher-researcher was the teacher of the course, a hierarchical power relation existed. As Creswell (2013) suggested, the questions were worded in a way to avoid leading questions and help students respond neutrally. Nevertheless, especially for the question on suggested improvements, the hierarchical teacher-student relation might have had an effect on student responses (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). Data triangulation helped mitigate this effect.

Results

In this part, the findings of the data analysis are presented under three headings: reflection task, peer observations, and end-of-term student survey. At the end of this section, the results from three different sources are collated.

Reflection task

Modelling

The reflection task revealed information about various aspects of the course design and implementation where care was implicitly modelled. The four themes under modelling were identified as use of appropriate teaching methods, course design, use of LMS to share documents and videos, and additional teacher support. Under use of appropriate teaching methods, 192 segments were coded. Small talk, small group work, games, analysis of samples and other student engagement strategies emerged as methods supporting student learning. Of 101 students, 64 of them indicated that small talk helped them practise and improve their speaking and communication skills. Students wrote that small talk increased their motivation and engagement. It was useful in building their confidence and overcoming their shyness and nervousness. Students referred to small talk as a fruitful activity fostering social interaction:

> Small talk is an activity that creates social interaction among students. Distance education brings about a less social classroom environment due to its nature. Small talk gives us a chance to interact with our classmates and makes us more willing to participate in class. (S1)

A total of 50 students out of 101 drew attention to various benefits of working in small groups in breakout rooms. Students stated that opportunities to collaborate offered by the breakout rooms reinforced their learning because they were able to effectively share information, see different perspectives, give and receive feedback and learn from each other. Another benefit of small group work was that it enabled them to interact, get to know each other and socialise with other members of the class. It also optimised their speaking practice time by allowing for more time to express their opinions. Sharing their ideas in small groups was reported to be less stressful compared to sharing in front of the whole class. Additionally, students stated that they learned how to work as a team. A commonly used small group task was analysing good and bad examples of CVs, cover letters and emails. A total of 8 students specifically stated that these analyses helped them write their own texts. The comment below illustrated benefits of working in small groups:

> To understand how to prepare a CV and cover letter, we discussed the CV and cover letter examples in groups. Thanks to discussion activities, students have to state their ideas about the topic. If a student misunderstands a topic during the lecture, the student can easily realise his or her mistake in the discussion session … discussion activities help us recognize wrong opinions about the topic. [When discussing an example], students should explain their counter-argument by using their knowledge. This provides a better learning environment. (S2)

Games were found effective in helping students learn (n = 45) by keeping them engaged and focused, testing their knowledge and learning, enhancing retention of information, encouraging them to prepare for class, and reviewing content. Students appreciated the element of fun and excitement games bring to the learning process. They stated that Kahoot games appealed to their competitive side. As one student (S3) wrote, "the game … helped me clarify things that I knew wrong … seeing the right answer when you answered wrong and the explanation from the teacher helped me understand correctly. I think some students learn better in a competitive way".

Of 101 students, 11 commented on the teacher's competence to use educational technologies effectively. There were also references to various other instructional techniques that encouraged student participation and helped them maintain their attention in class, which were grouped under other student engagement strategies. The most frequent comment (n = 6) was that students and teachers kept their cameras on during lessons. One student explained how he appreciated the feeling of a real class created by all cameras being on:

> Keeping cameras on makes me more confident and helps us feel like a real classroom … sometimes we are talking with our close friends about our appearances and making fun of it … sometimes we are talking on Zoom in private chat … For a long time, this is the first time we feel like in class. (S4)

For course design, 81 segments were coded, and three sub-themes emerged: relevance to student needs, structuring of the content and course design suggestions. A total of 65 students stated that the course being career and speaking oriented matched their needs, which increased their motivation. Six students commented on the strong link between different tasks and their cumulative role in preparing them to master the course objectives. As for course design suggestions, heavy workload (n = 6), the fast pace of the course (n = 3) and lack of materials on technological assistance (n = 1) were identified as points to consider.

Students stated that the use of the LMS to share documents and videos supported their learning (n = 59). Materials shared offered students the opportunity to follow lessons missed and study parts they could not clearly understand. Students appreciated the materials because they were easily accessible resources which helped them prepare for class and reinforce their learning. Students found the interactive videos and videos summarising the lessons beneficial for learning the topic, preparing for class and completing tasks. On the other hand, some students indicated the challenge of keeping track of the resources on the LMS.

Another theme was additional teacher support. A total of 16 students commented on the benefits of weekly maps and to do lists. They helped students to schedule their time to complete assignments and deal with the course load, and guided students who missed lessons,. They also helped them navigate their way through resources on the LMS and reminded them what to do before the upcoming lesson. The availability of the teacher and her willingness to help students was mentioned by five students.

Dialogue

The questions on the reflection task focused on materials, classroom activities and tasks. Therefore, very few students made comments related to dialogue. One of these comments focused on the dialogue between the teacher and the students:

> [Our instructor] is trying to improve herself too. She is asking questions to us, it can be related to the lesson or not, then she is trying to understand our replies and apply it. I admire her because she is open-minded. (S5)

Two comments were related to not having enough time to ask questions and engage in dialogue with the teacher.

Practice

Analysis of the data from the reflection task revealed how care was practiced in the course. Three themes emerged under practice: peer-to-peer support, building relationships, and caring for the teacher. Visual analysis of the data using the code relations browser on MAXQDA revealed that small group work and peer-to-peer support co-occurred frequently. Similarly, small talk and building relationships overlapped. For peer-to-peer support, 51 segments were coded with three emerging sub-themes: giving feedback, creating a friendly atmosphere and contributing to learning through discussion. Students stated that they helped each other improve their work by giving feedback (n = 26) and contributed to each other's learning through discussion activities (n = 11). A total of 14 students said that their friends were instrumental in creating a friendly atmosphere where they could work and learn together. Small group work that students participated in provided them with the opportunity to practice care:

> I tried my best to give proper feedback to my partners in tasks by carefully listening to them and knowing what to listen for, [to] engage small talks in awkward silences, and tried to overcome my stage anxiety further by engaging [in] talks with different people. (S6)

Another theme was building relationships. A total of 18 students commented on the opportunities to socialise and referred mainly to the small talk activity in helping them get to know their friends. The theme caring for the teacher emerged from the data (n = 14). The students used the reflection task as an opportunity to thank the teacher for her positive attitude and efforts she put in preparing materials.

Confirmation

Analysis of the reflection task provided evidence for the establishment of confirmation in the course. Two themes emerged under confirmation: a better self and quality feedback. The teacher, students' peers and course elements encouraged students to reconsider their perceptions about themselves and helped them come closer to their goals. One of the aims of the course was to help students explore their skills to guide

their career plans. A total of 27 students stated that the course helped them become more aware of their competencies, which increased their self-confidence. 20 students indicated that they started the course with reservations about their English-speaking skills but over time their confidence improved. Six students who described themselves as shy stated that they became more comfortable in communicating with others. For example, one student stated:

> I'm normally a shy person, and I do not like speaking with people I do not know well, not even in Turkish [native language]. However, I got a lot more comfortable thanks to these speaking activities. Even though I still get nervous in the beginning, I get relaxed after a few sentences. (S7)

Another theme was quality feedback. Four students were content with the feedback they received and believed the feedback helped them improve their work. On the other hand, one student thought that providing only written feedback was not sufficient, and students would benefit from talking to the teacher about the feedback. This student comment suggests the importance given to the need for more dialogue on given feedback.

Peer observations

Data from peer observations revealed instances of modelling, dialogue, and practice. Two of the emerging themes, using appropriate teaching methods and student engagement strategies, echoed the results of the analysis of the reflection task. The third theme, building a secure and positive class environment, revealed the interconnectedness of various components in Noddings' model and how they nurture and are nurtured by a secure and positive class environment (Noddings, 2012).

Using appropriate teaching methods
Teachers observed a range of tasks (see Appendix C) and overall, they thought that tasks were engaging and facilitated interaction. T2 praised the use of Padlet to elicit group summaries and whole class discussion. Despite her concerns about competitive games, T1 found Kahoot successful and said that teacher explanations during the game were timely and informative. The game was a creative way of checking assignments. T4 considered the game Hot Potato to be a nice warm-up and review activity. T3 observed that critiquing samples kept the students engaged by encouraging critical thinking and collaboration.

Other student engagement strategies
T2 indicated that the teacher made a welcoming opening to the lesson by using a variety of strategies. These included opening the session ten minutes before the lesson, posting a welcoming message on the Chatbox and reminding students of expectations such as keeping their cameras on. All observers stated that students were highly active in class. T1 and T2 indicated that cold call was used in a non-threatening way to encourage participation. Both thought that sharing an overview of the lesson at the beginning was an effective classroom management strategy. T1 identified the variety in interaction patterns, pacing of the lesson, and smooth transitions between different tasks as strengths of the lesson. She referred to these classroom management strategies as motivational strategies.

Although all observers appreciated the teacher's instruction checking method of asking a student for repetition, in three of the lessons, there were problems related to instructions. T1 and T2 suggested making instructions clearer by putting complex instructions on PowerPoint slides and chunking up bulky instructions. In the lessons these teachers observed, the time set for a group task was insufficient. However, T2 noted that when students requested more time, the teacher complied with the request.

In three of the observations, teachers witnessed problems in breakout rooms. There were students who tended to underperform (T2), and those who missed instructions and used up the time struggling to understand the task (T2 and T4). In T4's observation, two students, who were paired together, had missed the instructions. Neither knew how to share the screen to work together. It was almost halfway through the time set for the task when they requested help. T4 said that one student really tried hard to solve the problem, but the other was passive. These two students' reflection tasks confirmed their frustration stemming from their lack of experience with technology.

Building a secure and positive class environment

Three teachers indicated that there was a secure and positive class environment. T1 and T2 observed that short social talk between the teacher and students, and among students, contributed to this atmosphere. The use of humour and positive reinforcement were also raised as factors nurturing a sense of community. T1 questioned whether Kahoot games could demotivate some students. Based on her own experience, adult learners could be sensitive when some students' success is highlighted, and she suggested asking students how they felt about the games. Teachers who observed social talk among students indicated that this helped create a friendly and supportive class environment. This suggests that small talk created opportunities for students to engage in dialogue and practise care.

End-of-term student survey

Out of 103 registered students, 41 completed the survey. Categorising the seven closed-items under the four components of care-centred education model and coding the open-ended responses using the coding scheme revealed further evidence for the presence of care elements in the course. Overall, the results were consistent with the findings from the reflection task, and except for the workload students were content with the course. The results of the 5-point Likert scale questions are given in Table 1. The mean scores for the items ranged between 4.56 and 5, indicating that various aspects of the course and teaching were perceived and experienced positively by the students. The highest mean scores were for instructor's well preparedness (the mean score was 5 in all groups). To save space, the themes that correspond to items are indicated in the table in square brackets. As a result of this categorisation, a new theme, "positive attitude", emerged under modelling.

Table 1
Results of the end-of-term student survey

Descriptive statistics				
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
# of enrolled students	24	26	28	25
# of students who completed the questionnaire	14	11	7	9
# of students who wrote comments	7	6	3	4
Results (mean scores)				
1. The instructor seemed well-prepared for each session. [Modelling: Appropriate teaching methods]	5	5	5	5
2. The instructional materials (handouts, audio-visuals, etc.) were well-integrated into the subject matter. [Modelling: Appropriate teaching methods & use of LMS]	4.86	5	4.86	5
3. The instructor informed us of our progress. [Confirmation: Feedback]	4.92	4.73	4.86	4.56
4. The instructor communicated well. [Dialogue: Responding]	4.86	4.82	5	4.89
5. The instructor had a positive attitude towards students. [Modelling: Positive attitude]	4.79	4.64	5	4.89
6. The instructor encouraged students to participate in class. [Modelling: Other engagement strategies]	4.86	4.91	5	4.89
7. The instructor used clear examples, illustrations and demonstrations. [Modelling: Appropriate teaching methods]	4.93	4.91	4.86	4.89

A total of 20 students responded to the open-ended survey question asking students whether they had any additional comments. Student responses revealed themes only related to modelling and practice. Four themes emerged under modelling: course design (n = 15), appropriate teaching methods (n = 9), use of LMS to share documents and videos (n = 2) and additional teacher support (n = 6). For course design, students commented that the course was relevant to their career needs. However, students also complained about the workload of the course. Six students stated that their teacher was always willing to help. A total of 18 students thanked the teacher for her effort and kindness throughout the semester. This was coded under practice as it was considered an example of caring for the teacher. One representative student comment is:

> Our teacher was always very passionate and energetic to teach us and that motivated us to participate in class and do our best. She always tried to make the class interesting and enjoyable. Thanks to such an amazing instructor, for a great effort through the semester. (S8)

Summary of results

The course examined in this study was not designed based on a care-centred pedagogy. However, using Noddings' care-centred model of education as an analytical tool has shown us that a care-centred pedagogy might be the reason why the design principles and instructional behaviours in the course were considered effective. As demonstrated in Table 2, not all of the four components in the model were equally represented in the data. This is primarily because the data collection tools were not specifically designed for this study and none of the tools openly asked participants to identify what they considered caring.

Table 2
Summary of results

	Reflection task	**Peer observation**	**End-of-term of surveys**
Modelling	Use of appropriate teaching methods, course design, use of LMS to share documents and videos, additional teacher support	Using appropriate teaching methods, other student engagement strategies, building a secure and positive class environment	Course design, appropriate teaching methods, use of LMS to share documents and videos, additional teacher support, positive attitude, other student engagement strategies
Dialogue	Responding	Building a secure and positive class environment	Responding
Practice	Peer-to-peer support, building relationships, caring for the teacher	Building a secure and positive class environment	Caring for the teacher
Confirmation	A better self, quality feedback		Quality feedback

Research suggests a connection between careful course design and implementation, and a caring learning environment (Moorhouse & Tiet, 2021; Robinson et al., 2020; Tang et al. 2021; Velasquez et al., 2013). Teachers model care by the attention they give to their discipline, subject matter they teach, and teaching (Anderson et al., 2020). In our study, course design, materials and tasks, and instructional behaviour which were found effective by students and teachers suggest an underlying message of caring conveyed to the students. Specifically, the course's relevance to students' needs, use of appropriate teaching methods, successful use of educational technology and the variety of resources shared on the LMS increased student engagement and supported their learning. One thing reported to be lacking by some students was the adjustment of the workload, which can be considered a deficiency in caring (Robinson et al., 2020).

As Noddings (2013) stated, good teachers consider their students' needs and design lessons that keep them engaged and focused. Trying to engage all students in class through various tasks such as social talk and small group work were acts of caring. Furthermore, providing a variety of opportunities for interaction through use of breakout rooms (Rabin, 2021) and online tools such as Kahoot and Padlet were appreciated by students. The element of fun included in the course through such tools facilitated learning (Tang et al., 2021).

Various engagement strategies that reinforced teacher's presence were considered as effective practices, and these are identified as caring actions in studies examining pedagogy of care. Establishing connection through synchronous lessons and keeping cameras on was conducive to model caring. The teacher's own use of camera established teacher presence, allowing students to become more motivated and concentrated (Moorhouse & Tiet, 2021; Tang et al., 2021). On other hand, in rare occasions when students did not receive the support they needed, their negative thoughts and emotions resulted in their loss of motivation (Richards, 2020). Such instances illustrate the connection between feeling cared for and motivation. Analysis showed

that extra efforts to help students keep track of the course and achieve success were considered important in facilitating learning. Similar to Robinson et al.'s (2020) findings, being available and accessible through various means was considered an act of caring because students find it difficult to ask for help in online environments (Tang et al., 2021).

In relation to dialogue, observers made references to conversations between the teacher and students, and among students, which they linked to the creation of a friendly classroom environment. However, the data did not produce enough evidence to elaborate on this component of the model. When we look at literature on care (Noddings, 2005; Tang et al., 2021), asking students to reflect on the course in itself can be considered an example of dialogue. Students had ample opportunity to practise care. Group tasks created opportunities for students to make human contact and support each other. On the other hand, students used the reflection task and the end-of-term survey as a means of showing their appreciation of their teacher, which we consider a sign of caring for their teacher. Evidence for confirmation emerged only in student reflections where they reported a positive change in their attitudes about the course and an increase in their self-confidence (Velasquez et al., 2013).

Discussion

The increase in online education and new technological affordances have necessitated a reconsideration of course design and instructional behaviour. The physical separation in online education may hinder interaction and lead to a psychological and communication gap. As Markovic et al. (2021) underlined, "it is necessary to meet students' educational, social and emotional needs" to mitigate the negative effects of online education (p. 7). Despite the inherent challenges of online education, establishing care is possible. This study explored what students and teachers considered effective design principles and instructional behaviours in an online course. The results were situated into the four components of Noddings' care-centred model of education to identify which elements of care were present in the course. The findings both verify and build on the existing literature on care.

Noddings (2005) argued that "there is no recipe for caring" and highlighted the importance of taking into account individual differences when making pedagogical decisions (p 17). On the other hand, research studies, including this one, reveal some common practices that lead to effective instruction. Even though the current study did not ask participants which aspects of the course they perceived as caring, the results showed that care was present in course design and teaching. This finding corroborates the connection between good teaching and care. As Tang et al. (2021) pointed out, caring is not just about feelings or random acts but rather purposeful planning and decision-making on course design and implementation. Teachers' investment in their work, in their discipline and in their students implies the presence of care (Anderson et al., 2020). Therefore, a good place to start exploring care pedagogies for teachers might be reflecting on their current practices. The study also shows that it is possible to create caring learning environments without putting too much emphasis on the emotional aspects of caring.

The four components in Noddings' model are interrelated, and they all need to be addressed to nurture care. For instance, without dialogue, practice and confirmation are not possible. As Rabin (2021) and Noddings (2010) indicated, teachers have an important role in framing opportunities for practising care. Online classes can help students practise care for their friends, but it should not be assumed that working with others will inherently lead to practising care.

Additionally, this study revealed that practising care can also manifest itself as caring for the teacher. Through their acknowledgement of the teacher's hard work and commitment to helping them, the students practised care. Course reflection tasks such as the one used in this study can be used as means for students to communicate their needs. Noddings (2005) considered this important for teacher motivation. We suggest that teachers or instructional designers include reflective tasks both to improve instruction and student and teacher motivation.

Due to its focus on one institution, the findings may not be representative of other contexts. However, Noddings (2012) stated that "individual teachers can ask themselves how nearly their own situation and professional characteristics fit those described in the research" to make instructional decisions (p. 140). Therefore, the results of the study might be used to guide practice in online settings. Further research may focus on investigating whether the course design elements found to be effective in this study are actually

considered to be care by students. As Noddings (2005) said, caring is a relational activity and caring acts should be reciprocated by the cared-for.

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Corresponding author: Hale Kızılcık, khale@metu.edu.tr

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Appendix A

Explanations regarding the tasks and materials

Small-talk task: Following the unit on small talk, students completed a small-talk task at the beginning of class. They were given a prompt about light everyday topics such as "are you a tea or coffee person" and "a snack that you cannot resist" and expected to extend the conversation to three to four minutes. The prompt was shared in the Zoom main room, and then students were sent to breakout rooms in pairs. Back in the main room, students were invited to share anything interesting they learned as they chatted.

Analysis of sample work in small groups: In the course, students learn writing emails, CVs and application form responses. Before writing their own, in small groups, they critiqued several good and bad samples. Breakout rooms and Padlet (a real-time collaborative web platform) were used to arrange group work. After the discussion, students posted the outcome of their critique on Padlet indicating the room number and members. Back in the main room, groups were invited to present and discuss the posts. These discussions were followed by a short summary by the teacher where she expanded the discussion referring to the literature on the topic.

Peer feedback in small groups: Breakout rooms were used to provide opportunities for peer feedback. Tasks included giving feedback on a live online presentation, CVs and answers to frequently asked interview questions.

Games: Kahoot (a game-based learning platform) games were used to check if key information in the assigned texts or videos were comprehended and to explore students' background knowledge about a topic. After each question, the teacher made explanations and elicited questions and comments to ensure that the game was informative. Another game was an online version of Hot Potato. Students were told to turn off all the cameras. Then they were given a prompt such as "what have we learned/do we know about CV writing". The teacher started the game by contributing a piece of information and then "threw the potato" by nominating a student. This student turned on his or her camera and shared another piece of information. Students who gave an acceptable answer, kept their cameras on and nominated another friend. If they could not remember anything new, they said "pass" and left the camera off. The aim was to open as many windows as possible within the allocated time.

Self-exploration tasks: The course started career planning with a set of self-exploration assignments (e.g., self-exploration presentation, career-storming, elevator speech) designed to encourage students to reflect on their interests, skills, and values to guide their career choices. These ungraded assignments were all part of a job application process. Additionally, since the tasks were novel for most students, for each task, a sample was shared on the LMS.

Materials designed and curated for the LMS

Weekly maps and to-do lists: The teacher prepared videos to help students to keep track of the materials and assignments shared on the LMS. These included to-do lists and weekly maps explaining how to navigate the materials on the LMS.

Interactive videos: The department prepared three interactive videos on how to write a CV, cover letter and statement of purpose, and the first two were completed before the reflective writing task. The outside class videos were basically lectures embedded with tasks that check understanding.

Summary of the week: Due to privacy issues, the teacher was not permitted to record the synchronous lessons. Instead, the teacher recorded videos summarising the main topics of the week and put them on the LMS.

Sample demonstration videos: The teacher prepared sample videos for certain tasks assigned to students. For example, the teacher demonstrated how to do the self-exploration task by preparing a presentation about herself.

Appendix B

Teacher participants of the study

Teacher	Teaching experience (in years)	Experience in the context (in years)	Background
T1	17	1	Language acquisition and instructional technology, PhD Works in the United States of America
T2	16	16	English Language Literature, PhD Administrative role in the department Taught the course
T3	20	19	Comparative Literature, Master of Art Course coordinator Co-author of the coursebook
T4	21	2	English Language Teaching, PhD Teacher-trainer

Appendix C

An overview of the observed lessons

Teacher	Week	Overview of the lesson
T1	Week 3	*Reading assignment check* As homework, students read a text about the career story of a successful individual. Homework is checked using a Kahoot game which covers the key information in the text. Answers are followed with short commentaries to highlight the link between the story in the text and students' own career journey.
T2	Week 4	*Writing emails* In groups of 3 or 4, students analyse a set of badly written authentic emails and prepare a list of do's and don'ts. They post their lists on Padlet. The posts are discussed as a whole-class activity. After class, the teacher edits the list and shares it on the LMS.
T3	Week 5	*Writing a CV* In groups of 3 or 4, students use a checklist to analyse a sample CV and get prepared to give constructive feedback to the imaginary owner of the CV. The feedback is shared as a whole class.
T4	Week 5	*Review and reflective work* Students play Hot Potato to review what has been learned so far in relation to CV writing. The teacher shares general feedback on performance in the self-exploration presentation, including samples of good and bad group reflection. In groups of 3 or 4, students identify language mistakes in the given sentences. This is followed by whole-class sharing of answers (mistakes are compiled from the field notes taken while watching the presentations).